

EPA to limit mercury from cement plants

April 22 2009, By Renee Schoof

The Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday called for the nation's first limits on mercury emissions from the more than 100 cement factories across the U.S.

The proposed new rule would require cement kilns to add pollution controls that would reduce mercury emissions by 81 percent by 2013. The rule also would reduce emissions of soot, hydrocarbons, hydrochloric acid and [sulfur dioxide](#) from the production of cement.

Mercury is contained in the raw material used in kilns and in the coal used for power. Once released into the air, mercury travels over wide distances and settles in soil and water. People are exposed to mercury mainly from eating contaminated fish.

The toxin can damage the brain and nervous system and is especially dangerous to fetuses and small children.

Environmental groups sued the EPA over a decade ago to try to force it to impose the emissions controls. The agency agreed to set new standards in court documents last year. It announced the new regulations late Tuesday.

A report by the environmental law firm Earthjustice, which was involved in the cases, said the largest concentration of cement manufacturing in the U.S. is in Midlothian, Texas. Other plants are scattered around the country.

The EPA said in a statement that cement kilns were the fourth largest source of mercury emissions in the U.S. In addition to setting the first limits on mercury from existing kilns, the new rules also would tighten the limits for new kilns, it said.

Andy O'Hare, the vice president for regulatory affairs for the Portland [Cement](#) Association, said in a statement that the industry group was reviewing the rules and would work with the EPA, but had no further immediate comment about them.

Before the rules take effect, EPA will have a 60-day public comment period.

Jim Pew of Earthjustice said the regulations were "very good news for health and the environment."

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